Interview with William G. Ridgeway

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WILLIAM G. RIDGEWAY

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Bill Ridgeway at his home in Nokomis, Florida. This is February 28, 1989.Bill, I would like you to start out by giving a little background about how it was that you got started in doing radio and motion picture type work, follow in with your activities in the Army and the military government in Korea, and then indicate under what auspices and just how you got integrated into USIA, or rather its predecessor agencies. Then we will discuss the various program work that you did.So, Bill, please take it from there.

Beginnings of Government Work with U.S. Military Government Health and Welfare, Korea 1946

RIDGEWAY: Thank you, Lew. I arrived in Korea in late January, 1946 as a U.S. Army PFC. Subsequently, I was assigned to our military government, and designated the Public Health and Welfare Officer in the 44th MG Company, located in the province of Chon Ju. The company was located in the town of Chung Up.It was the first time I had ever had any experience working with foreigners, or supervising anyone. I was assigned two GIs (no more knowledgeable than I) to fight a very bad cholera epidemic. Apparently,

the cholera was brought to Korea by refugees returning from China. That gave me my first taste of dealing with foreigners. In that summer and fall of '46, we cared as best we could for nearly a half million people, afflicted, or at risk to cholera. Our three teams of medical students, headed by a Korean doctor, inoculated everyone in the province twice. We chlorinated wells, sprayed homes with DDT, and buried the dead. Road blocks to curtail travel, using the Korean police, were set up.In this time of great misery I expected everyone to work together. My eyes were quickly opened to the real world. To my amazement I learned the doctors were selling fake stool exams (to allow travel), and the police were easily bribed. I grew up that summer. It was quite a baptism for a very green kid from Honesdale, Pennsylvania.

By Happenstance, Ridgeway is Offered Assignment to Armed Forces Radio Station

In my off time I developed photographs for the men in the company and repaired their radios. Parts were hard to come by, and scrounging was a way of life. I needed a certain type of radio tube, so on one of my official trips to Group Headquarters in Chon Ju I went to the Armed Forces Radio Station to scrounge. (That trip, as it turned out, was the beginning of my Foreign Service career.)When I went there — this was late in the fall of 1946 — I discovered their transmitter was off the air. The Army radio engineer had rotated back to the States, leaving them in dire straits. The civilian program direct or asked me to see what I could do. Fortunately, I was able to repair the transmitter and get them back on the air. He was quite happy with my work, saying that there was a spot open for a civilian engineer. Well, I had never really thought of staying in Korea or taking on a civilian job there. I filed the offer away in my memory and went back home with my radio tube.A month or so later I was shipped to Seoul for return to the States. There the radio job offer became more attractive. I was assigned to the replacement depot located in Inchon. It was a terrible place, a former Japanese army barracks without windows, without hot water, heat or anything. Food and coffee were frozen on the mess hall floor. And, worst of all, no sign of a ship!

Foreign Service Career is Launched — Army Discharge Becomes Army Civilian Employee

After living under these circumstances for about six weeks, I went into Seoul to see the major in charge of Armed Forces Radio. They were quite happy to see me, and said they had been expecting me — I don't know why, as I had never indicated any interest. They immediately signed me up to take on the radio job (and made glowing promises about the rapid promotions I should expect).They gave me the appropriate papers to have signed, necessary for discharge in Korea. I returned to Inchon and went around and obtained all of the signatures and clearances necessary for discharge. I was probably one of the first few GIs to be discharged in Korea.I received my discharge, to be effective that night at midnight. I hitchhiked a ride into Seoul on a Korean truck with all my worldly belongings in an Army duffel bag. I checked into the civilian billet — it was the first time I had seen a bed with sheets and had hot water in a very long time.Three days later I was on a train back to the radio station in Chung Up. I stayed there for eight or nine months, and then the station was closed and I was moved to Seoul as assistant engineer.My duties more or less were to take care of the equipment, and now and then to assist with some of the control board work.

Meets Future Bride

The next important turn in my life was when I met the young Korean girl I eventually married. I met Tongsuk during a remote broadcast we were doing in Ewha Women's University during Christmas week. We began to see each other, which, needless to say, was quite difficult for her in those times.

1947: Ridgeway Moves from Army Radio to Army MOPIX and in 1949 is Taken Over by Department of State

The impending move of the radio transmitter I was responsible for to the boondocks would doom the romance. I was able to have myself transferred from AFRS to the motion picture

section of the Army's Information and Education division. I'm not sure what it was called at the time. It was under the Department of the Army, that I remember. Again I was involved in the technical aspects of taking care of all of the equipment used by Motion Picture Distribution.In January 1949 my organization was taken over by the Department of State from the U.S. Army. At that time my own personal problem of trying to obtain permission to marry improved. Under the Department of State, unlike the Army, it was possible to apply for permission, which I did — and, incidentally, including a copy of my resignation. If I was turned down, they would accept the resignation and I would be shipped out.

Marriage, June 1949

Well, anyhow, four months later we received permission to marry. (The letter of permission included the warning that I could not expect advancement in the Service, being married to a foreigner. Fortunately, things changed.)We were married on June 8, 1949. A year later I was still doing the same sort of work, assistant to the motion picture officer, Chuck Tanner. (Still no promotion.)

Home Leave: June 1950: Korean War Begins

We left on June 10, 1950 for the U.S. — my first home leave and my wife's first visit there. We were in New York City two weeks later, when on June 25, 1950, the North Koreans invaded the south.We lost everything we owned, that we had left in our small government-supplied house. I think it was located east of the Capital building in a compound called MG-II. There had been rumors for some time of an impending invasion. Tongsuk had been asked by the director (PAO) to monitor the North Korean radio. In the last broadcast she listened to, the communists boasted they would celebrate Liberation Day (August 14, 1950) on the steps of the Capital building — in Seoul. They did!We were refugees in the States. My pay had been stopped because my pay card had been lost during the invasion. Eventually, we received a small temporary allowance to tide us over. I went to work in our New York City office and worked there until October, when I was given the assignment

to return to Seoul as motion picture officer. Chuck Tanner apparently refused to return to Seoul because he couldn't bring his wife. No dependents were allowed at the time.

October 1950: Ridgeway Returns to Korea (Without Wife); Seoul in Ruins

So I went back. The city, needless to say, was quite different from the one I had left.

Q: Did they permit you to take your wife back with you?

RIDGEWAY: No, no.

Q: Even though she was a native of Korea, they wouldn't do that?

RIDGEWAY: No. Later on they did.

Q: I see.

RIDGEWAY: Okay. At the time I returned it was in October 1950 and the city was quite a mess, and the PAO —

Q: Bob Spear?

RIDGEWAY: No, Bob was much later. Stewart, it was Jim Stewart.

Q: Jimmy Stewart.

RIDGEWAY: Jim Stewart was PAO at the time. Needless to say, he was quite busy, so I went to see him and asked him, “What am I supposed to do?”

Ridgeway Restores MOPIX Operation

So he said, “Well, try to get what you can together, and get the movie thing going. My original staff and the motion picture production staff were able to find out where the communists had stashed our raw film stock and pre-print material. We literally went around

and picked up all of the staff that they hadn't taken north. Fortunately, we were using 16 mm. film exclusively with our mobile units, not 35 mm. They had left the 16 mm. and taken the 35 mm. stock and prints.

Q: You said where the material had been placed by the communists. Were these the North Korean invaders?

RIDGEWAY: Yes.

Q: You are talking about them? By that time they had been driven back north of you and your staff knew where they had stashed this while they were around?

RIDGEWAY: Yes, right. So fortunately they only used 35 mm. raw stock. They left great quantities of our 16 mm. raw stock, and had not taken too much of our pre-print material. The equipment, which really was nothing to brag about, we recovered. So we got the operation going.

North Koreans, Aided by Chinese, Reinvade South; Evacuation to Chinhai

Our first production was a three reel, or thirty- minute, film on the progress of the war. Then the roof fell in. The Chinese communists got into the act and started the next round of the invasion.By this time it was in the dead of the winter — mid December. We were faced with the problem of finishing what film prints we were making and at the same time starting to evacuate. I used seven bottles of whiskey to obtain seven boxcars from the U.S. Army sergeant in charge of boxcar assignment. At the railhead we loaded the boxcars with all of our equipment, the employees and their dependents — a total of 350 people. One by one they were shipped off to Pusan — final destination was Chinhai.I shuttled back and forth between Seoul and Chinhai, hitchhiking on military aircraft. Everything on track, I left on the final trip out of Seoul somewhat after Christmas. The city fell to the second invasion in a few days. We went to Chinhai because we had a small Information point (Center) that was to serve as our new studio! The building was the former Japanese naval officers' club

of Chinhai, of typical Japanese construction with sliding paper doors — a real fire trap!We put all of our stuff in the building and tried to place our people around town, wherever they could find room for their families.By this time headquarters had evacuated from Seoul to Pusan. I went to see the PAO to report that we were down, et cetera. He asked me what did I need? I said we needed to fix the place up and make some rooms light-tight, and bring in water and electricity.

Restoration of MOPIX Production Facilities at Chinhai

I already had made some preliminary estimates of what it would cost. The plan was to do the work ourselves. All of the Korean staff members had other skills, because in those days almost all of the people in motion picture production started off as floor sweepers in commercial theaters. There they were able to work their way up through the ranks, so to speak. Most of them had little or no formal training in any of the arts. To have been a bricklayer earlier and a scriptwriter today was quite normal. Consequently, we had a large reservoir of talent in the organization. I had a staff of about eighty-five people at that time.I told the PAO I would need about $7,000 or $8,000 — something in that neighborhood. He said okay and gave me a chit for the Budget and Fiscal office. I was given a duffel bag of Korean currency and a carbine with a magazine of ammunition and was told, “Here you are.”I put the money in a bank in Chinhai and we started to fix the place up. It took about six or seven weeks and we were back in business again. It worked out quite well for, oh, about a year. We were producing a weekly newsreel, and I think by that time we had even started to produce Korean adaptations of American films.

Communist Advance Threatens New MOPIX Facility

Q: The first question is not a direct question on the program, but I have forgotten. How far did the Chinese and North Koreans get after they overran Seoul the second time? Did they get down to the periphery of Pusan?

RIDGEWAY: Yes.

Q: I thought they did — almost took Pusan.

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes, almost. Our studio in Chinhai and later Sangnam was just — I guess it would be west of Masan, east or west, whichever way it is — to just the other side of Masan, looping north to just the other side of Pusan. The Pusan perimeter was the closest point that the Chinese and the North Korean forces came. It was quite close.

Q: I thought I remembered it was very close.

RIDGEWAY: One of our mobile unit drivers was shot in the butt when he and a USIS American, being happily waved on by South Korean forces, went past the front lines. Pretty soon they discovered where they were. As they went around a bend they were fired upon, the Korean driver being wounded.

Nature of MOPIX Production: Themes: Danger of Undercover North Koreans

Q: Getting back to a question about the program, now. Besides the newsreels that you were producing, what was the theme of the pictures you were producing? Did they have a story line or were they documentaries, or what sort of material were they?

RIDGEWAY: The newsreels that we turned out were designed to support the efforts of the Korean government and the U.S. in fighting the war. It was clearly propaganda. We called the communists just about every vile name you could think of, and used all kinds of statistics and facts that would bolster morale. It was the Korean government's policy to foster hatred of the communists.I questioned some of this myself at the time, because the most dangerous communists, outside of someone coming at you with a tank or a gun, were the ones you could not identify. The most dangerous ones were the ones working under cover, and there were a number of them.The Korean government totally ignored that concept, at least as far as their own propaganda went. My attempt for a different

approach in anticommunist propaganda, began with a script written in collaboration with our Korean writer. We produced a full-length black-and-white anticommunist feature film called “Boxes of Death.” It was a story showing how the communists used an agent in the guise of a young wounded veteran. He came to the village carrying the ashes of a young man who was from the village. He had been allegedly killed in combat — actually it was a cover.The audience was able to understand this — that was how it was scripted — to see how the communist undercover operative was able to turn one faction of the village against another. The agent's purpose was to disrupt the Korean government's operation behind the front lines. To use the ashes of a dead hero for cover was considered quite vile of the communists by our audience (and this was the reason I used it).That was the first time, as far as I know, that this particular approach was used in trying to point out — a communist could look just like you or anyone else. The Korean government posters would show the communist as a bloodthirsty monster, with a knife clenched between his teeth and a knife in each hand.

Q: I wanted to ask you, were any of the infiltrators getting into your shop or were you sure of all of the men that you had?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, we had no problem there.

Q: You had no problems. You had known them before?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes.

Q: I had another question, but I can't think of it, so go ahead.

RIDGEWAY: That place served quite well. I may just be running on too much on that.

Q: Oh, no, that's fine.

RIDGEWAY: Because it can always be cut.

Q: I want to cover this in detail.

RIDGEWAY: As I said, the “studio” was a fire trap. We insulated it against sound the best we could. We built a soundproof booth using rice hulls for insulating material between double walls. For the glass in the window of the soundproof booth we used jeep windshields. It was all improvised.We also scrounged a lot of stuff from the air base that we were able to use. I worked out a deal with the U.S. Air Force at the Chinhai air base, a few miles away (which used to raise Hobb with our recording sessions) to borrow a 16 mm. automatic film processing machine.

Cooperation with Army-Aided Film Production

None of the equipment we were using at the time was automatic. The machine was very helpful to us because we could produce our 16 mm. prints faster. We also used it to process their gun camera film. Normally they were shipping their gun camera film back to Japan and not getting the film back until the following day. By processing the film the same day, the pilots could see the effectiveness of their strikes, before the next mission. The base had the equipment but not the know-how. They had no one who could run it or whatever.So we scratched their back and they scratched ours. It gave them almost immediate access to their gun camera films after a strike in the north. The pilots were well served, as were our own needs.

But Film Processing was Still Done by Makeshift Means

You may wonder why a film-processing machine was such a prize. All of our film was developed in two hundred-foot lengths on curtain stretchers dunked in wooden tanks by hand, with no temperature control of any sort.In the winter, the soup (developing chemicals) literally was put in large GI aluminum pots and heated over a GI gas stove. It was then dumped back in and stirred around to bring the temperature up to the

approximate degree it should be. In the summer it was the same thing — the pot was floated in cut-off fifty-five gallon drums of ice and water to cool it off.

We ran three eight-hour shifts and worked seven days a week. As I said, we had no modern equipment. It was all done by hand.The film came out of this mess coated with a very thick scum. We hired young girls who did nothing more than scrub every inch of film with a mixture of ammonia and alcohol. Every inch of film was scrubbed that way. Since the film was broken down into two hundred-foot lengths for developing, it had to be spliced together for the next step. When your sound is on one piece of film and your picture on another, little bits and pieces were always missing. To correct this, we went through the horrendous mess of sound matching which would take a week or more to do. All of that to complete a ten-minute reel of film!

Q: Who were the actors who participated in the films?

RIDGEWAY: All local.

Q: You just picked them up around the place, or were they actually professional actors?

RIDGEWAY: A combination. What we would usually do would be to go into a village and talk to the head man and explain what we were doing — sit and drink some sake, tea or something, and discuss the film and point out how it was helping the war effort. This would take quite a bit of time.We would get his cooperation and the cooperation of the villagers. We would usually pay a little bit, not too much — pay them as laborers, but really for the services of using their house and their village or whatever.

Q: Did you speak any Korean at that time?

RIDGEWAY: I did at that time, yes.

Q: Had you been trained in it or just picked it up?

RIDGEWAY: No, I just picked it up. I had only two people on the entire staff who spoke English moderately well.

Q: I wondered if you had to work through an interpreter or do it yourself.

RIDGEWAY: No, no. Eventually I became reasonably fluent — not always proper, but at least I communicated.

A Windfall: Acquisition and Renovation of a New (Fireproof) Studio Building in Sangnam

The next phase of our development began due north, over the mountain from Chinhai. There I found this fantastic empty building, 150 foot by 50 foot wide, two stories of solid reinforced concrete. Prior to the Korean War it had been looted by the local people for all the stuff they could recover from it — wooden frames from the windows, wiring, pipe, whatever. But it was very well built. I saw this shell as a potential fireproof studio. In those days such a building was an extreme rarity, especially unoccupied.The war was still going on. This was, I guess, in late 1951 or early 1952. On my next trip to Pusan I extolled the virtues of this new site to the powers that be. Everyone thought it was a great idea, but really a dream. It was assumed we would win the war and move back to Seoul. The idea to have film production located permanently, so far from headquarters, was not looked upon favorably.Well, I took 22 visiting firemen from Washington through, including Herb Edwards, who was head of IMV at the time. He saw the potential for the building. To my surprise, at the end of the fiscal year I received a hurried call from Pusan saying, “You now have $25,000 to fix the place, and all the contracts have to be let within ten days!”Needles to say, we did it and we moved in. The facility was a thousand percent better, and this time, besides much better security, we were off by ourselves. We had a country locale where we literally could build sets right on our own property, with our own rice paddies and everything. We did a lot of shooting in the studio — now we had a real sound stage for the first time. It was well soundproofed. All the pieces began to fall together. We began receiving the modern automatic development and printing equipment that I had

ordered from the U.S. For the first time we were properly equipped.My serenity was soon shattered. All of the lab chiefs went on strike when the new processing machine arrived. They thought they would lose face in not knowing how to operate it, so consequently they quit. I don't know what they really expected us to do, but anyhow I was able to train their assistants in on the new machine. That was the end of the old lab chiefs and their strike. They all had their own special formulas which were closely guarded, even from each other. It was assumed we would be helpless without their know-how.The film that we processed by the old system was terrible. A particular scene would go from white highlights and pure black shadows to absolutely flat gray because of the difference in processing the film at different times. So, finally, for the first time we were now able to turn out reasonably good quality, consistent photographic material — and, best of all, at the same time, at a much greater pace. The new equipment included sound recording equipment that used magnetic film. We no longer had the problem of matching two hundred-foot lengths of film together — everything was done on one big one thousand-foot roll, what an improvement! The staff absorbed the new techniques. We literally hired young girls from the rice paddy and trained them in how to run the film printers. They were much better than the men. First of all, they followed instructions and didn't have to unlearn anything like some of the older movie people.A good two-thirds of the staff were originally contract employees. I had placed them all in Foreign Service Local positions when I took over, as the contracting was a dodge, and a convenience for graft. Their former boss, the contractor, was now chief local. He did not like it at all, because he no longer was making a lot of money. He was a constant problem, but necessary, as his age and former position insured staff loyalty. Korean society respected age and position — both went hand-in-hand. I was twenty-seven at the time, my authority a conundrum to the Koreans — and resented. (We Americans often ignore the cultural traditions of the host country, a legacy we pay for later.) The new people we hired and trained followed “clean room” rules carefully and were much better employees.

Early 1953: After Home Leave, Ridgeway Returns to Sangnam with Family —

I returned to the U.S. for home leave in December 1952 to pick up my wife and daughter Janet, who was born in the U.S. I was given permission to bring them both back. Tongsuk was the only other dependent besides the ambassador's wife to return to Korea at that time. We returned in early 1953, while the war was still on.

Q: That was Ambassador Briggs at that time.

RIDGEWAY: Yes, yes. He came over to visit the operation. (Now it is a humorous story; it wasn't then.)

Ambassador Briggs Makes a Memorable Visit to New Studios

He came over with his wife and, I think, his daughter. They were coming over to visit the studio, and then were driving over to Chinhai to look at the cherry blossoms. You may remember that Chinhai during cherry blossom time was a sea of pink and white. It was quite beautiful.I knew the ambassador liked very dry martinis and insisted on mixing them himself. Fortunately, in the things we had brought from the States we had included the usual Foreign Service necessities — glassware, silverware and other stuff for fine dining, of course.We had just arrived at the studio in Sangnam only a week or two ago, and everything hadn't been unpacked. So while the ambassador was on the way (I had not been notified he was coming until he was on the way), I was busily unwrapping martini glasses we had in a cabinet.Then I put them out — I don't think my wife had even noticed that. So after the ambassador arrived, the first thing he wanted was all the mixings.I brought the glasses out and my wife was making funny waving motions at me. I didn't realize what it was, but apparently the glasses were very, very dusty. You know, I had too many things on my mind, and the last thing I would notice was the condition of the glasses, I suppose. So I put them out for the ambassador and he — if he noticed it, he ignored it. A real diplomat!They had lunch with us. The kitchen stove had blown up just before he arrived and we had black soot slowly filtering down all over everything. These things would only happen when you have a VIP like that. It was quite funny, but not at

the time.He was a very fine man. I drove him over a terrible mountain road in one of the original mobile units to the cherry blossom festival. It rode like a tank. The women and my baby daughter Janet rode in his staff car. The ambassador asked me many questions about my operation, and actually briefed me on the political situation. He seemed very pleased with what we were doing. I was the only American there and everything was running well. The studio site was a great bargain. I had arranged to lease it from the Korean navy for ten years without charge — a free lease hold arrangement. We paid no rent or anything, so it was a very good deal — and we were able to extend the lease indefinitely.Ambassador Briggs had that wonderful ability to make one feel they were part of the team and important. It was a day I shall never forget.

Q: What was the mobile unit?

RIDGEWAY: The mobile unit was ...

Q: A French Delahaye?

RIDGEWAY: No, no. We had a French Delahaye. We received one of those. We used that as a camera truck later.The original mobile unit was a jeep that some contractor in the States had built a body on. They were extremely heavy and very cumbersome. The whole thing was not terribly well done, but it was better than nothing. The built- in generator gave us power to show our movies throughout the country.

1958: Ridgeway Leaves Korea After Thirteen Years —Assignment to Philippines

We stayed in Korea until 1958. We turned out a large number of productions. My wife participated in two of the more important ones — the birth of my son Bill and my daughter Cindy. After thirteen years in Korea it was hard to leave. It was on to the States for home leave, and our first “normal” assignment — the Philippines.

But First, Further Discussion of Later Years of Korean Tour

Q: During the rest of the time you were in Korea, were you more carefully directed — I mean, were you more centrally directed as to thematic treatment, or did you just go on doing pretty much what you had been doing before? Were there any changes in the type of product that you were putting out?

A: Small Degree of Guidance or Supervision of Film Production from USIS Headquarters

RIDGEWAY: No. Actually, while I was located in the Philippines I had nothing at all to do with —

Q: I was thinking of while you were still in Korea.

RIDGEWAY: While I was still in Korea, for all practical purposes until I left in 1958, I decided what went into the reel and its contents. The finished prints would go up to Seoul each week. It wasn't practical to review a weekly reel. Communications were very poor, and certainly not secure for classified discussion.We only had one of our newsreels held up by the Korean government censor once. We were telling the exact unpleasant truth, and the government did not want to have it shown. It was about a political rally by the opposing party, and the government had said in the media they controlled — the press and radio — that only a few thousand people showed up. Well, in our film you could see people as far as the eye could see. Obviously there were far, far more than five thousand people.Outside of that one time we had no real problems. I would have program direction, so to speak, every month or so when I would go to Seoul. It was no big problem. We developed a slogan after the war — after the truce started — “We will work together as we fought together.”

Q: Did Bob Spear come on while you were there?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes. He was there during the war — a very nice person.

Q: Oh, he was. He came back and died of lung cancer.

RIDGEWAY: Yes, I liked Bob.

Q: So, in effect, you were practically autonomous. You were saying what you were going to do yourself. You didn't get really much guidance or direction.

RIDGEWAY: No time — really, no communication in those days, you see. It wasn't until the last two years, I think, that we were in Sangnam that we finally were able to obtain a single side band radio. We were able to link up with the other field posts and Seoul. Of course, you couldn't discuss anything classified.

Q: No.

RIDGEWAY: We did not have a classified courier service, either. Also, it was just plain common sense what we were saying and doing.

Q: So you really were not synchronizing in a direct sense with other elements of the U.S. Information program. You were doing what you thought was right and producing things that were acceptable to the government —

RIDGEWAY: — and every week this was reviewed by the PAO and everyone else in Seoul and no one found any fault with it, so I suppose that is one way to look at it.

Q: So who was your successor when you left?

RIDGEWAY: Niels Bonnesen — well, actually my successor in Sangnam was Lorin Reeder, who had come on board as my assistant — I forget now exactly — a year or two before I left. It was sort of awkward because he could have been my father several times over. As you know, that was one of the problems I always had from the very beginning, being so junior to everyone who worked for me — really awkward.(Pause.)

B: Sangnam Operation Proved Viability — and Value — of In-Country, On-Site Production

Lew, Sangnam proved the viability of the concept and the need for facilities to produce on-site informational film material, and to do adaptations of films about America. It provides the immediacy and the current local language being spoken at the time. Most of the films we received from Washington, voiced in New York, were with the wrong accents, and described things with words that were long out of date. It also was far cheaper.

C: U.S.-Made Films Mostly Inappropriate for Field Use in Korea — Techniques Used to Render Them Usable

Q: In a case like that, what did you do? Dub the new track on?

RIDGEWAY: Yes, yes. We would get — eventually we did all our own versions in Korea.

Q: Yes.

And USIS Films “Make” a Korean Movie Star

RIDGEWAY: We started a — because many of the American-made films contained concepts that were complicated or difficult to get across, I started an introductory series for use with such films. We used an actor to play the role of “a grandfather” — you know, the chap in the black horsehair hat and with the long bamboo pipe. The character was called — “Halibaji” — grandfather, an authority figure that would command respect and would be listened to.This character would introduce a film live, in a setting appropriate to the subject, and explain something about the content that was not apparent in the original. We used his live sound along with the Korean soundtrack of the original film. His explanation would put it in a context that the people could understand. That was much easier for us to do than to re- edit. That was impractical to do anyhow as we wouldn't have access to the pre-print material. This was cheaper and easier to do and much more effective.We would have a little — oh, maybe a three-minute intro, and then at the end of the film he would come back on again, with about a minute or two. He would reiterate, “This is what you should have understood or learned from what you have seen.” An example would be, explaining

something as complex as the United Nations, or a film about the United States.We made, oh, several hundred of those. In fact, the actor who played the part became quite famous in Korea for his role as “Halibaji,” the grandfather.

Q: He went on to a commercial career?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes. It worked out quite well. There were a number of things we did that were not normally done in the film business, but we had a war going on and then we had the reconstruction period after the war. The important thing was to get the material out in a form that could be assimilated by the people.To insure that our films were communicating the intended message, we would have an interlocked screening for a typical audience. (An interlock is when you run edited picture on a projector and the matching sound is on a different machine. The effect is similar to the finished product.) We would invite people from the nearby village. They would come and look at it, and when the showing was over we would question them to see if they understood the points we were trying to get across. If they didn't, we would change the script, and/or change the cut.Sometimes we would do that two or three times. It allowed us to produce a product suitable for our target — the villager. This way, we were able to come up with a product that communicated the ideas we were trying to get across, about reconstruction, health, sanitation, or whatever.

D: A Major Goal of Film Program Was to Sustain Loyalty of Korean People to Their Government During Post-war Rebuilding Period

Q: In part you have answered the question I was about to ask, which was: getting away from the strict war themes, what else were you presenting? I presume — I gather from what you said that you were presenting films that were promoting what the government was trying to do to rebuild the country —

RIDGEWAY: Right.

Q: — and to explain this to the people at the grass roots or “rice roots” level.

RIDGEWAY: Right, right, exactly — and to make sure that they would maintain loyalty to the government, and, of course, support for the U.S.The documentaries that we made, or Q the American- produced films that we made adaptations of, would cover a wide range of things on government, education, agriculture methods, the United States — not necessarily always appropriate for Korea, but at the same time they would convey the idea that the government can help the farmer.We were trying to point out that the government is your friend — the Korean government is your friend — because, after all, there was a tremendous amount of very bad press that existed before the war. And, of course, the communists left no stone unturned to paint the government in the worst light possible. The government had a pretty poor, well-deserved reputation from the beginning, making it easy for the communists.

Q: This was during Syngman Rhee's time?

RIDGEWAY: Yes.

Q: I would like to go back and ask you a question about that episode in which you were threatened with censorship.Did they actually let you show the film?

RIDGEWAY: They just held it up. They just held it up. They held it up for a week or two and then they allowed it to go out. The National Assembly voted to lift the ban. Quite a vindication.

Q: So it did go out showing the size of the crowd?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: At that time was there any beginning of some of the anti-American sentiment that developed later because of the support of Syngman Rhee while he was in power, or did you notice any of that?

RIDGEWAY: No. I left in 1958, March of 1958, and Rhee was still in power. If I correctly remember, most of the problems we faced at that time with the government were Rhee's desire to march north.

E: The Controversial North Korean Prisoner Release

We had the big POW breakout when the Koreans let the north Koreans who were in South Korean POW camps go. It was that sort of stuff, and then the prisoner exchange. Those were the main points of friction at the time.

Q: I had forgotten about the release of the North Korean prisoners. What was the motive behind that and how did it — what happened after he released them? Did they all go back or did they spread into the countryside?

RIDGEWAY: They just went into the woodwork throughout the countryside.

Q: So as far as you know, many of them might have stayed on and later begun a fifth column type of activity?

RIDGEWAY: It is quite possible, quite possible.

Q: You don't know if they went back to North Korea?

RIDGEWAY: Well, allegedly the reason they all were released was because they turned anticommunist and all wanted to stay in the glorious south. That was the reason the Korean government gave for releasing them, rather than to “force them to go back,” against their will. (The U.S. position was displeasure, unofficially ...)

Q: Before you go on to the Philippines, do you have anything else that you want to say about the Korean experience?

Korean Progress from “Ox Cart” to Major Industrial Nation in Few Years Was Foreshadowed by Ingenuity Shown by MOPIX Korean Employees in Early 1950s

RIDGEWAY: Well, it is very interesting to look at the progress the country has made. We are talking about a major industrial power that has gone from an ox cart economy to supertanker construction — in a few short years.During the time we were building our studio the ingenuity of the staff became quite apparent. We could make almost anything, and often we literally did. We constructed a film printer for an example. We obtained scrap aluminum from the air base and melted it down to make castings. They were machined in our own machine shop, where we made the parts and created a piece of machinery that would cost $10,000 to $15,000. We did it in our spare time for a few thousand dollars — most of that spent in the U.S. to buy the parts we couldn't make.We could keep almost anything running. You mentioned the Delahaye. There was always something going wrong with it. We modified it with cannibalized parts from U.S. trucks — it eventually ended up half or more an Army three-quarter ton truck. The Koreans, I suppose, because of necessity were great improvisers. They seemed to be able to understand how things work quite well, so I am not at all surprised to see how they went literally from an ox cart society to four lane superhighways. Almost anything you buy there is made in Korea.

Q: Do you know that many of your technicians later went on to careers in the Korean film industry?

RIDGEWAY: I understand that some did. I don't really know, because I left in 1958 — there were many changes after that.

Q: Just as a matter of curiosity, is USIA, as far as you know, producing any films in Korea now or has that all gone by the wayside?

RIDGEWAY: I understand that all stopped.

Q: It has in most countries.

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes. It would be hard to justify.

Q: As you say, from your observation of the Korean people, they are a remarkable and dedicated people; they are very adaptive and they are very ingenious and they can do almost anything if they put their minds to it.

RIDGEWAY: Yes, that's true. They work quite hard, too.

Q: Yes.

RIDGEWAY: It is interesting — getting back to a film that we were working on. We wanted some visual examples showing people working together. We did a lot of research and the only thing that we could come up with in Korean society, traditionally, historically, that people collaborated on was only one thing — the distribution of irrigation water for the rice crops.In those years, weight-lifting, tennis or any of the individualistic sports were common. Sports that depended on teamwork were quite rare.Apparently this has changed. They have instilled the same group work ethic they have had in Japan.(Brief pause.)

Return to Discussion of Philippine Assignment

Q: All right. We have just taken a short break. We have come to the point where you were transferred to the Philippines, so let's proceed from there.

A: Manila Job Was Regional Service Assignment Supporting Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia

RIDGEWAY: The assignment in the Philippines was to the position of Regional Motion Picture Officer. I was responsible for the completion of USIS films being produced in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.Saigon was producing a weekly newsreel in French, Chinese and English and Vietnamese. I think we did French, but I may be wrong on that.The

material would be put on the Pan Am flight Friday night. We would meet the plane, rush the material to the lab, have it processed and turn it around and ship it back by Monday. So usually I worked every weekend. I did not do the work myself. I just supervised and approved what the lab was handling, both with the sound recording and in making the answer prints and spot checking the release prints. (The answer print is the first print made. It is used to determine if all is satisfactory, prior to the full run.)

Q: Was this the time in which Alan Fisher was MOPIX director in Vietnam?

RIDGEWAY: In Saigon, yes.

Q: So you were not really doing a program for the Philippines. You were actually doing a support operation primarily for Saigon.

RIDGEWAY: Right, exactly.

Q: I see.

B: Putting a Stop to Theft of Raw Film Stock

RIDGEWAY: The problems we faced there were the difficulties of keeping the lab and the contractors honest. Apparently they more or less stole, appropriated or whatever you want to call it, all the raw film stock they wanted. They got away with it just by simply saying that it was destroyed or damaged in processing, and no one ever bothered to check on it.I had the same problem in Korea, where law raw stock and, in particular, camera film were quite valuable. It was a hundred times more expensive than it would be in the States, so it was an excellent item for sale on the black market.So what I did — the same thing I had instituted in Korea — was in effect a double entry bookkeeping system for raw film. It is not as easy as it sounds because it has to be handled in the dark. When I started checking the records, we had anywhere from thirty to fifty percent wastage on certain types of stock.For example, on sound recording film they would say they needed a thousand feet for a ten-

minute film. What I discovered was that they were using both sides of the film — both edges of the film. First they would record one way, rewind and then use the other edge. That way they would get two rolls of film from us for one reel, and they would pocket the other. That was just one example.I was able to cut the shortages, through waste or by theft, by instituting the accounting system. We cut it down to approximately three percent on release print stock, well within the commercial average.What I did was make them — if they took a thousand feet of film, to give us back a thousand feet of processed film — it didn't matter if it was good or not, because they would not know whether we put it on the rewinder and checked it (in the dark).They would give us back processed film and film that had not been exposed. They were instructed to splice together in the dark, and use it in printing rush prints — perfectly satisfactory. There was no reason to use good uncut stock when you are going to cut it up later, anyhow.That way we were able to reduce our film budget considerably, with large savings for the government.

C: Rebuffing Bribery Offers

Needless to say, this did not put me in a favored position with the contractors. When I first arrived in the Philippines, I was met at the airport and offered the keys to a nice little red open sports car for my use. I thanked them for the offer and graciously turned it down.Later on I was also offered — or the insinuation was there — that if I needed an feminine companionship, this could be very easily arranged. So basically my position was to keep my staff of two on their toes in handling the books, and to make sure the labs gave us what we were paying for and not cheat us blind.By the way, one of my staff was Pat Kelly, a Filipina of great charm and well connected to the power structure. Years after I left the Philippines, she married — General Lansdale, the famed counter-insurgency expert. We kept in touch while we were residing in Washington. The general died a few years ago.Every five or six months or so, the MOPIX officers in the three countries would have a mini-regional conference. I would fly over and discuss the various problems they were having with the films they were sending me. Some were technical and some were problems of content. I remember offering my observation about Vietnam. There was no

way in the world we could hide the fact, and keep it secret, the bid six-foot Americans in jungle dress dropping in and out of helicopters.My opinion at the time was that we should have informed the Vietnamese public, and given some rational reason why they were there, because otherwise the communists, as they did, would just pick it up and run with it.The assignment there really was quite blah in a way, not at all exciting — quite pleasant living but nothing really extraordinary. The main highlight was the birth of our son Robert, evening out the family to two boys and two girls.

Q: That pretty well covers your experience.

RIDGEWAY: — in the Philippines, yes.

Q: Where did you go after that?

New York Assignment: 1963

RIDGEWAY: After the Philippines we were assigned to New York. I was supposed to go to Washington, but because President Kennedy was shot the slots were all frozen. The only open slot was a slot in New York, at the MOPIX office in New York, so I was assigned there.

Q: That meant you were in the Philippines a total of nearly five years.

RIDGEWAY: Five-and-a-half years. There was nothing really exciting about the Philippines.

Q: No.

RIDGEWAY: The job in New York was not too bad. Let's see, I was — what — a production supervisor. I supervised the production of adaptations of American films, a few special newsreels, and screen magazines for the Middle East. It was all done under contract, of course. I would simply go in and look at the film during the different stages of

production, and approve it before release printing and shipment.We would take some of the films into Washington once a month for interlock approval by Washington. I would go up along with the contractor.

Great Trials of Trying to Get Film Production Contractors (and USIA MOPIX Officers) to Adapt Stateside Production to Needs in Less Developed Countries

Again, I had not too much to do, except to try to get the contractor to use editing, sound recording or script techniques that would suit an overseas audience rather than an American audience. This was one of my major struggles. The only production that I personally scripted, and supervised the shooting of, was a three-reel film on Kenyan livestock officers. They were here on a grant. Part of their trip was to spend a day with an American farm family in Coffeeville, Kansas.I had quite a bit of difficulty with the contractor because I tried to have it edited for an African audience. Although I have never been to Africa, I could imagine the situation there. They would need a slower-paced production than something that was just a series of five or six frame cuts. It was quite popular at the time, under George Stevens, to make artsy-craftsy films for the film festivals. That type of thing — was very nice for a showcase film — for when you left the Agency, to get a new job. It was not the way to convey ideas about an American lifestyle to — blacks in Africa.So, anyhow, after quite a hassle with the contractors — they were all positive that Washington would reject the cut — I took the rough cut to Washington and Alan Fisher (Chief of Foreign Production) liked it very much. The director of the Agency liked it too — I'm trying to remember, I think it was Carl Rowan at that time. Anyhow, there was a bit of a feud going on between him and George Stevens.

Q: The African area director wasn't Ned Roberts, was it, or had he gone? I think he had left.

RIDGEWAY: Yes. Anyhow, he wrote a memo to Stevens saying, “This is exactly like the kind of films that we want for use overseas,” which did not do me any good with IMV. The

even bigger sin was the very low cost of my production. After that, the word was put out, there would be no more “in-house” production.

Film Officer in Bangkok: 1966

Fortunately for me, an assignment came up in Thailand. I think my name was mud of the darkest color at that time in Washington. So I transferred to Bangkok.

Q: What year was that?

RIDGEWAY: That was — 1966.

Q: At which time Jack O'Brien was still the PAO in Bangkok.

RIDGEWAY: Yes.

Q: So when I got there a year later your facilities were quite good. Did you inherit a good facility or did you have to do a considerable amount of doctoring to bring it up to what you thought was an adequate production capability?

RIDGEWAY: Yes, you could use that term. The situation when I arrived in Bangkok was that there was a quiet memo-writing feud between the motion picture officer and the information officer. They both were saying why this should be this and why it couldn't be done, or something like that.

Q: Was Jerry Novick the IO?

RIDGEWAY: Yes, right. Biggler was —

Q: Who was the MOPIX officer?

RIDGEWAY: Harold Biggler.

Q: Biggler was your boss?

A: Adapting Local MOPIX Production in Thailand to Thai Village Understanding

RIDGEWAY: No, Jerry Novick was. It was just a clash of personalities, and because of it nothing much was being done. Jerry was wary of motion picture types, as I think he used the term. Well, I have never considered myself a motion picture type in the sense that I had to imitate Hollywood.It took some time for me to convince Jerry that there was a way to do what he wanted. I could produce the films that would convey what was necessary to the village audiences.I am sure Jerry felt he was sticking his neck way out with what I suggested we needed to do. As you know, the Thai villagers were far more primitive than Koreans. So, if anything, you wanted to have whatever you were trying to tell them as lifelike and realistic as possible.So that is what we started to do — producing both documentaries and feature-length films. We used very few of the standard motion picture techniques of cutting. We used long, continuous slow shots, live dialogue and color. And for the first time in Thailand we actually used live sound in a film produced on location up country. It worked out quite well.

Q: Were you always producing feature-length films or did you have a series of documentaries and newsreels, too?

RIDGEWAY: We had a screen magazine which we turned out every two weeks. In the early years we covered things that were taking place at the Trade Center, AID projects, some visiting American, or an event at AUA (the Binational Center, called the American University Alumni Association, therefore AUA). This was after, as you may remember, the great change-over from a field program to an urban program. You may remember this quite well.

Q: I had left by the time they cut off the field programs.

RIDGEWAY: Yes, I know, yes.

Q: I left just as they were starting to cut that out.

RIDGEWAY: It was too bad, just when we really learned how to produce good counter-insurgency material they stopped it.

Q: It seems to me that you were producing another kind of —

RIDGEWAY: Oh, the tactical film?

Q: Yes, the tactical film.

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes. To inform or teach a small group of people at a relatively low cost I came up with the idea for a quick and dirty technique. It would not be a typical motion picture, but would use motion picture equipment and modified technique. We would enlist the branch post — if and when they had a need for such a film. I will use an example. In a southern province the rubber planters were trying to improve the quality of their rubber.The branch PAO, along with his local employees and the people in the Rubber Institute, prepared a simple type of script. It was a set-up in real time, using a series of tables to hold the props used in the demonstration. They would demonstrate how crude latex was turned from liquid latex into a block of rubber, all within ten minutes, going through the various stages and steps.The camera would follow the action (and the expert) by panning, tilting and zooming from a tripod, centrally situated. The experts from the Rubber Institute would be providing a running narration in real time — no editing. Mistakes were corrected verbally, without stopping the camera.A ten-minute roll of 16-mm. film was placed in the camera. A sound recording machine was recording the sound on magnetic film, while at the same time the speaker/narrator walked through, to practice a few times. They would practice that way and then shoot it. Now, maybe if something was really terrible they would shoot it twice, but in most cases the man would just correct himself and just continue.The film would be sent to Tokyo, without titles — if they wanted to have titles they

would draw simple titles on a card, and the camera would zoom in to include them at the beginning.Basically, the camera was fixed on a tripod.

Q: A single camera.

RIDGEWAY: A single camera. It was all arranged so that by panning and zooming you could follow what was being described, whether it was on the rubber thing or new strains of rice or whatever.It would be shipped to Tokyo, and Tokyo would merely develop the film, match up the sound, which was a few seconds job, and knock off six or seven or ten prints for that particular locale. It would be back literally within a week for use in the field.

Q: Did all the showings of those take place through our mobile units in the field?

RIDGEWAY: Yes, or they were loaned out to the government, but usually from our own mobile units.

King of Thailand Writes Sound Track Music for USIS Films of Royal Family

Q: You were also covering certain of the activities of the king and queen, I remember.

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes, yes. We had several very interesting projects with the palace. The king wrote the music, being an excellent jazz musician. He wrote — I think it was — a four-hour opera. He wrote the music and the queen worked on the lyrics. Most of the cast was from the royal household.We shot it in 35-mm. color. They bought all of the materials. They paid for all of the processing and they paid for all of the shipping. All we did was to supply the equipment and the know-how and do the editing for them. The film was produced to raise money for the queen's charity, a children's charity. I don't remember the name of it.It really turned out quite well, not too bad at all.

Q: Did we ever use that film in any of our village programs?

RIDGEWAY: I don't think we ever used it. We completed it just a few months before I left. It may have been afterward, but the reason it was produced was for a road show throughout the country to raise money.

Q: I remember that also you produced some of the king and queen's visits to various special events on their tours around the country when they were "do-gooding" for the benefit of the people.

RIDGEWAY: Yes.

Q: We always presented the king and queen with a copy of the film when it was completed.

RIDGEWAY: Yes. We also produced a special film for the king and the president when Lionel Hampton visited. Were you there then?

Q: I don't remember that. Maybe it happened either before I came or after I left.

RIDGEWAY: It was a very special arrangement. We shot their session and it was completely private, not for use in any other place. That was the arrangement. Now, whether the president ever saw it I don't really know. I had no way to know. We sent a copy to the Agency for the president as agreed, and a copy went to the palace with appropriate ceremony.

Q: Which presidential visit was this?

RIDGEWAY: No, this was Hampton, Lionel Hampton.

Q: Oh, Lionel Hampton. I thought you said it was presented to the president.

RIDGEWAY: Yes. The idea was that it was a special event, with a copy for the president of the United States and a copy for the king of Thailand. It was the king and Lionel Hampton, playing the king's compositions together.

Q: Jamming?

RIDGEWAY: Yes. It was great. We ended up with about a twenty-minute film.We had a presidential visit — it escapes me which president it was —

USIS Had Excellent Relations with the King, Queen and Royal Palace Staff

Q: It probably was Nixon, because we had a Nixon visit while you were there and I was there. I think the visit of Lyndon Johnson preceded my arrival. Perhaps you were there also when he came, but I wasn't. I was there in 1969 when Nixon came.

RIDGEWAY: It probably was Nixon. We had excellent relations with the palace. When we wanted coverage, instead of having to go through the Embassy to the Privy Council for permission, Kun Sumon of my staff would get on the telephone and call the palace. Our contacts were the twins, confidants of the king. They had grown up together. We would receive approval to do this or that within a few minutes, literally holding the phone, while one of the twins checked it out with HM. (One twin was in charge of the king's radio station, and the other the rest of the media — motion pictures.)

USIS Uses Palace Connections to Enable USIS Coverage of President's Return Dinner for Royal Family

So when the president came, as you well know, a great flap went on. We had the usual problem with press pools and camera pools and what have you. Everything was very carefully slanted to favor American television coverage.We — USIS — were literally frozen out of coverage of the president's return dinner, and I think one other occasion where only the president was there. The camera pool was limited to American TV and, of course, the

royal Thai photographers.They probably would have skinned me alive if Washington had ever found out about what we did. What we did was to arrange with the palace for our cameramen to be accredited as royal Thai photographers. They were given appropriate lapel pins and were accredited by the palace. This way they were allowed inside the palace for coverage. Without that coverage we would have had a great gap in the thirty-minute film of the king and queen with the president, and none of the president's return dinner.At all of the Thai functions we had no problem because, again, we used the palace credentials, but not in the president's dinner, which was sort of ironic in a way. It was that kind of closeness that we enjoyed with the palace that allowed us special privileges.The film that we produced of the visit was thirty minutes long and very, very popular. It was used in almost all of our shows for a long time because it showed the U.S. and the Thais being very close and friendly. The king and queen are very popular and their friendly association with the president made him quite acceptable also — a rationale for the film.

USIS Use of Feature Films to Aid Thai Government Objectives

Q: How many feature films did you make during your period there?

RIDGEWAY: In Thailand? I think four.

Q: Would you explain what some of the basic themes and story lines were in those films?

RIDGEWAY: One feature-length film was on health and sanitation. We (and the government) wanted the villagers to shy away from the village witch doctors and medicine men and to use the health clinics. This was the rationale to make the film. We wanted to show that the government was there to help you.There was a rather long intro of about thirty minutes showing this attractive young woman, quite pregnant and having problems because, one, she had not had the proper prenatal care and, two, she had gone to the witch doctor. Of course, the child was stillborn — that made the point.So we wove throughout this two-hour film the advantages of having appropriate health care from the government. It was not in an obtrusive way, not as a lecture, and not saying this is

how it must be done. It was done by using an example: where they did not use the clinic, misfortune came their way. For the person who followed the appropriate path, they had healthy children.We made two anticommunist features. Again, that same technique was used: how the communists behind the scenes plotted against the people was shown. In their forced meetings the communists would hold in a village, they would tell the village head man to get everyone together. Then they would lecture the people on the evils of the government.To counteract that, what we did in the film was to show the communist chief and his henchmen plotting what they are going to do. We eavesdropped while they had a back-and-forth conversation discussing what was the best way to convince the villagers.The villagers have watched our film. So, later on, when this same thing occurs in real life — the communists come into a village and try to persuade the villagers — the villagers have been inoculated. They can see how they are being manipulated and used. In theory it made sense. Research seemed to support it.

Q: You used all Thai actors?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes. All Thai actors, yes.

Q: Were any of those professionals or were they people you recruited out of villages?

RIDGEWAY: A few — some of the lesser roles were local people. Most of them were professional actors.

Q: They probably got paid better by you than they did when they acted in their own films.

RIDGEWAY: Yes, but, as you know, in Thailand at that time, sound on film production was not commonly done. They were using versionnaires in the projection booth playing all the voices — each time the film was shown to an audience! It also was a very convenient way to dodge the Thai government censor. They would start with a script that had been approved. As soon as they were out of sight of the city, they would say more or less what they wanted to say, in most cases quite risqu#. They literally played to the mood of the

audience at the time.In many cases the versionnaires were as famous, or as sought-after, as the actors themselves — really an interesting art form.

Q: So you produced this one health film. You produced a couple of anticommunist films, in effect how to look out for agitators and how to recognize a communist infiltration attempt. Do you remember what the fourth film was about?

RIDGEWAY: No, I can't. I think it was something to do with — again, it was something to do with health, but I am not really sure — it may have been a combination. I just don't remember. It has been almost twenty years.

Use of Early Video Recorders as a Tool of MOPIX Production: Value as a PR Device and as Economy of Film Production

Q: As I recall, for the first time — at least it was the first time in the USIA program — you used television which recorded on the scene, so that you could tell whether or not the film that you had just shot was going over properly. You had it in black and white, of course, but you could tell whether it had been shot properly, and if it went all right you didn't have to do retakes.

RIDGEWAY: That's right. I had forgotten that. We used the first pre-commercial example of the Sony home video recorder and the advantage of it was two-fold. One was to have the actors and the director see how things were going. This allowed the director — because directors, Thais being Thais, hated to tell someone they haven't done too well. They are very sensitive. So that way on the screen actors could see themselves, so suggestions could be made in a much more gentle way.It also was a tremendous PR tool with the villagers, because the villagers could see what was happening immediately on the little screen. This helped everything to go over very, very well.The savings of film stock was tremendous because we would rehearse it on tape. Once it was okay, then we would shoot film and tape, so when we finished the scene we would review the videotape and see if there was anything wrong no one had caught.Our shooting ratio to edited and good

footage was about 1.5:1, which is almost unheard of, so we paid for our video equipment almost immediately.

Q: I suppose the villagers enjoyed seeing themselves on a few of those tapes, too. Did you give them an opportunity to show themselves on the tape and then have it played back to them?

RIDGEWAY: Oh, yes, the village head men and others — particularly people where we were using their house or their yard or whatever in the village. It was an excellent PR tool. It was most useful.We also used a Polaroid camera, too, which —

Q: You could leave the pictures with them?

RIDGEWAY: We would leave the pictures with them, yes.

Q: Did you ever go out yourself on some of the village visits when they would go out to film some of these films?

RIDGEWAY: Yes. I would go out not too often — in fact, oh, maybe three or four times a year. I would go out and see how things were going. I would usually go out on the feature productions.

Q: Yes, I know you went out on production.

Use of Special Effects in Making Films for Village Showings

RIDGEWAY: I had to worry about some of the special effects that we improvised.For example, in the anticommunist film we had someone shot in the chest with a shotgun in one continuous take. Again, the idea was to make sure this was something realistic rather than being faked.

Q: Yes.

RIDGEWAY: That particular time was when I threw my back out and was in the hospital. I came back from up country and was really quite wrung out.One becomes very tense, because if someone is hurt in doing something like that it makes excellent propaganda for the communists to pick up and say, well, see, they are trying to malign us and at the same time they are killing people.I worked out several techniques — for example, when the communist chief executes the village head man, the camera is behind him. He gets down off the wagon where he has been standing while speaking to the villagers. He gets down — all one continuous shot. He walks up about six feet from the head man, pulls his revolver and fires point blank in the guy's chest. He fires three shots and you see the blood squirt out of the guy's shirt — and you hear the shots, too, all in one continuous take.The other scene was a re-enactment of a true incident where a village schoolteacher held off — “held off” is not a good term — shot the communists who came after him. He was in his house and had barricaded himself behind sacks of rice up on the second floor.The camera shows the communists going up the ladder and then the camera cuts to inside, and you see our hero with a shotgun leveled at the door — a double-barreled shotgun. The door is kicked open and there you see, looking over the shoulder of the teacher, the two communists in the doorway.Our hero fires the shotgun at point blank range right at the chests of the two men, and this bloody mess erupts from their chests — visually quite effective.

Q: Was that a shot that you later worked into a feature film, or how did you use it once you got it?

RIDGEWAY: That was part of the feature film. That is what had me so concerned, because it was quite dangerous, but I was able to work it out. What we did to produce this effect was to take a regular shotgun shell apart and remove the powder and the shot. I had obtained from Washington, from IMV (USIA's motion picture/TV service), or whatever it was called in those days, some fake blood — Hollywood blood, I think it was Max Factor #3, the real good stuff needed for color.To give the illusion of blood squirting out from the

chest, you had to have blood erupting, synchronized with the shotgun blast. What I did, after a number of experiments, was to remove all of the shot and the wads and most of the powder. I experimented with small loads of powder and found it all too strong. Eventually I ended up just using the primer — the shotgun shell primer. It was strong enough. Halfway down each shotgun barrel I placed a small piece of sponge, soaked in the fake blood. There was enough force from the primer firing — and a puff of smoke — and enough force to propel the blood-soaked sponge against the chest and bounce out of view. It looked quite realistic. We added the sound of a real shotgun blast during editing. It all worked quite well.

Q: I was wondering how you managed that.

RIDGEWAY: The other thing for the effect on the man's shirt — the blood coming through when he was hit — do you remember those tiny flash bulbs, the little all-glass ones?

Q: No.

RIDGEWAY: Well, they have a little primer inside and oxygen and fine wire. We cut the end off, just left the little primer, and taped it to a little U-tube of copper tubing that was closed off at the end and had a little hole drilled in the side. It was taped to a piece of cardboard that was taped to the man's chest.On the upper end of the U-tube was the flashbulb. It was taped in a way to hold it up, so that when the primer fired it forced the blood out through the fabric.The wires ran up the man's pants, inside his shirt and down his back, out of sight, to the modified flashbulb. Wires went to a step switcher we made. It hooked up to the sound system. Every time the gun fired (cap gun using a primer type of cap), it made a loud snap and a puff of smoke. As it fired, it would activate one of the U-tubes fitted with the flashbulb primer. It worked in perfect synchronization — bang, squirt, bang, squirt, bang — like that. It worked as planned. During editing we replaced the cap sound with sound from a real gun to make the effect realistic.

Q: How long did you stay in Thailand after the start of dismantling the field program?

RIDGEWAY: Well, let's see. That was then — 1973?

Q: I don't remember, but I think much sooner.

RIDGEWAY: No, 1970, I think.

Q: I think it was probably 1970, because Shakespeare had just come out and said, well, we've got to start cutting back on this program.I left at the end of May in 1970. We still had all of our thirteen posts, but they were soon scheduled for closing, most of them.

RIDGEWAY: I left in 1973. We were the first element of media production to shift what we had in the works to the new program. It was a matter of re-editing and shortening and changing the script. The productions that we had in the works to a great degree were salvaged and used.

Q: You didn't produce any feature films after that, did you, or did you?

RIDGEWAY: Yes, we did — let me see, now. I guess that second one on health we did afterward.

Q: Then, generally, since you were not producing many field films —

RIDGEWAY: Not for the field.

Q: — what were you —

RIDGEWAY: The screen magazine type, short documentaries.

Q: How many minutes, approximately?

RIDGEWAY: The screen magazine was ten minutes. The documentaries were ten to twenty minutes, plus our productions with the palace.

Q: Did any of these ever get into the commercial theaters or were they all shown —

RIDGEWAY: Oh, they were all shown in the commercial theaters, besides being available for loan in 16-mm.

Q: They all were —

RIDGEWAY: We shot everything in 35-mm. We had a very good distribution system there. Very good.

Q: Not only in Bangkok but all over?

RIDGEWAY: All over. Oh, they ran for years, literally. We had excellent distribution there. Mr. Chu — remember Mr. Chu? He was in charge of film distribution.

Q: I don't remember him.So what did you do after Thailand, then?

1978: Life in USIS/USIA after Thailand

RIDGEWAY: Well, after Thailand I thought I was going to go to Rio, and we were all set to go.Hal Schneidman — I'm compressing a lot on this — Hal Schneidman had decided he wanted me to go in the Exhibits Service as Production Chief, which was sort of rough in a way, because I did not have practical experience in exhibits. Of course, much of the film production experience would apply. I suppose they assumed that.

Q: Okay. Let's pick up after the break. We are ready. (Tape.)

RIDGEWAY: So, instead of going to Rio, like it had been originally planned and prepared for, I went over to the Exhibits Service as Chief of the Production Division.I attempted

to make myself useful to my new boss, Bill Davis, for whom I developed a very high regard. We were able to, oh, do a number of shows and exhibits that I think were useful in supporting Agency policies, et cetera.

Once Again: Clash Between Officer with Long Field Experience and Domestic EmployeeProducers on Best Means to Reach Foreign Audiences

It was my first experience with Washington infighting. It was not only my first experience, but a bad one. I think this can occur when a returning Foreign Service Officer is thrust into an office that is populated by Civil Service employees. They may be specialists or those who have never gone overseas or would never go overseas.They look upon a returning Foreign Service Officer as someone just rocking the boat or stirring up trouble. They are not really interested, I think — in my experience — to tailor the media material for a foreign audience.I have always felt that was one of my specialties. I think we must try to think as an alien might, before we can be sure we are communicating. We cannot expect our audiences to simply accept something, because it looks nice to us, on the front of Newsweek magazine or in a window on Fifth Avenue. It is a different audience to a great degree, and just because you translate it into the local language does not necessarily mean it will work, either. We must understand the culture — fully.

The Stage-Managed “Survey” of the Exhibits Service That Turned Out to Be a “Hatchet Job”

Anyhow, the office politics were somewhat annoying. One day we were informed that a survey would take place in the organization. It was presented in terms that it was a useful thing, since we were doing such great work. It would be nice to find out if we could benefit from a further infusion of funds, additional personnel or whatever. That was how it was described.However — again, this may be part of the Washington in-fighting scene — it turned out that the survey was a facade and, once completed, a hatchet job on Bill Davis, my two deputies and myself. Contrary to what we had been promised, we were not shown

the material in draft form. It was presented to us in final form — at the same time it was distributed to other members of ICS.We were quite unhappy about this. Our protests were not listened to, so we took it to the grievance board. After quite a bit of time, and back and forth arguing, our points were accepted as valid. The Agency, under the signature of the director, put out a memo to all those who had read the report. The report was described as harmful to our professional status and careers and deemed not to have any validity.

Q: Do you think that had an adverse effect on the balance of your career in the Agency?

RIDGEWAY: Yes. It is one of those unfortunate situations a person can get into, quite unwittingly, where you may win a battle but end up losing the war. I was offered an overseas assignment, but I felt they offered it to get rid of me. They did not want this embarrassing situation continued further in — public.We had a lawyer from the union working on our case. We were prepared to subpoena the former director, the former deputy director and the other people who had been involved in this. I have no direct proof, but I strongly suspect my two deputies and I were sacrificed to get at Bill Davis — who is black. Bill spoke his mind — like a senior officer should — and was, in my judgment, brilliant. Too brilliant for a black man and the tastes of some — it was a vendetta. There is an old Korean saying that applies: “A nail that rises above the surface of the table must be pounded back.”It was a situation where, after it was all over, one of my deputies retired due to the stress from it, the other soon after. And, as I said, I was offered an overseas assignment. I believe they wanted me to leave the scene and withdraw my grievance — which I would not do.After winning the grievance, my job was reduced — the position was reduced to something of a figurehead. I had very little work to do, practically speaking. I merely put in my time until the opportunity to retire came up. It left a somewhat bitter taste in my mouth. I have always enjoyed my time with the Agency and felt that it provided me with many good opportunities.So it is just sort of sad and unfortunate, but that's how it goes, I suppose. The real ironic twist is the years I spent describing to our audiences the fairness of U.S. justice. At the very end of it all, I find the system wanting in my own

organization, pure in proclaimed goals and ideals but tainted with straight-faced injustice and subtle racism.

Q: Yes. I consider this to be a very unhappy ending to what was otherwise a very successful career. I think you were wronged.Having had personal experience with you and working with you in Thailand and also knowing a number of other people who have worked with you elsewhere, I think you were one of the outstanding motion picture officers in the Agency, and it is just too bad that these things happen and that careers have to end this way. I know how you feel.I thank you very much for submitting to this interview and it has been a great pleasure for me to be able to talk to you this afternoon.

RIDGEWAY: Thank you, Lew, very much. It is easier now to put the survey affair in proper perspective. I retired a little over ten years ago after more than 33 years of service. They were good years. My work was often praised and I received commendations from the Department and the Agency, and promotions. Overall, I enjoyed my career in film making to the utmost. We both served during an exciting period in U.S. history, in a part of the world that is front stage today.I believe the efforts we made during the formative years of those countries have helped advance important American ideals. Democracy in various stages is certainly on the rise worldwide. We participated in mass media control, perhaps the most important (and dangerous) tool for social purpose. Examples of such use, both for the good and the bad, surrounds us today. Elements of political and religious fanaticism still exert undue influence.Only time and the unfettered spread of ideas will tame the Lorelei that would still entrap us. We have a good start. The force of reason should eventually prevail, rather than reason of force. We were there at the beginning — what more could one ask?

End of interview